

CHRISTMAS TREE CENSORED IN EUGENE, OREGON

The city manager of Eugene, Oregon, Jim Johnson, has issued a directive banning Christmas trees from public places. Johnson argues that the tree is a religious symbol and therefore cannot be placed on public property. The ban was issued after "a number of non-Christians" complained.

In his memo of November 20 to all city employees, Johnson said that while it could be contended that the Christmas tree is a "holiday" or "seasonal" decoration, "it is just as clearly a decoration associated with a religious holiday or tradition." He justified the ban as a way of "practicing diversity." After firefighters protested, Johnson offered a compromise that would allow Christmas trees in fire stations on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. However, Johnson also said that if one person objects, the tree must be removed.

Catholic League president William Donohue stated the league's position today:

"In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *County of Allegheny v. ACLU* that 'The Christmas tree, unlike the menorah, is not itself a religious symbol.' Indeed, it allowed a menorah to be erected outside the Pittsburgh City-Council Building precisely because it was surrounded by a secular symbol, namely a Christmas tree (by contrast, a Nativity scene standing by itself was not allowed). In making this decision, the high court cited the *Lynch v. Donnelly* ruling of 1984 that 'validated the crèche'; that decision said a crèche was legal because it was surrounded by such secular symbols as a Christmas tree.

"It is undeniably true that banning Christmas trees is a grand act of censorship having nothing to do with the U.S.

Constitution. Not surprisingly, the censors at Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the ACLU and the Interfaith Alliance are backing the ban. That a gag order is supported by these groups demonstrates their decided preference for intolerance and contempt for true diversity."